BESSEMER AND LAKE ERIE RAILROAD, GREENVILLE SHOPS (Canadian National Railway)
86 Ohl Street
Greenville
Mercer County
Pennsylvania

HAER PA-642 PA-642

### **PHOTOGRAPHS**

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

#### HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

# BESSEMER & LAKE ERIE RAILROAD, GREENVILLE SHOPS

## HAER No. PA-642

LOCATION: 86 Ohl Street, Greenville, Mercer County, Pennsylvania. The Greenville

Shops are located at latitude 41.3986, longitude -80.3872. The

coordinate represents the center of the turntable. This coordinate was obtained on 10 December 2008 by plotting its location on the Greenville West, PA USGS Digital Raster Graphic in ESRI ArcGIS 9.2. The accuracy of the coordinates is +/- 12 meters. The coordinate datum is

North American Datum 1927 CONUS.

DATES OF

CONSTRUCTION: 1893 – 1951

ARCHITECT/

ENGINEER: Pittsburgh, Shenango & Lake Erie Railroad; Bessemer & Lake Erie

Railroad

PRESENT OWNERS: Canadian National Railway

SIGNIFICANCE: This shop complex was built for the maintenance of the Bessemer &

Lake Erie Railroad's locomotives and cars, with initial construction in 1893. It was the main running maintenance and heavy repair facility for the railroad. Subsequent additions enlarged the complex through 1951. The surviving structures reflect the industrial architectural heritage of the region. The Erecting Shop is one of the finer surviving industrial buildings in Northwestern Pennsylvania, and the turntable is still in service. The Roundhouse is an excellent example of a once-common, but increasingly rare structure uniquely associated with railroads.

DESCRIPTION: The shop complex consists of seven major buildings, of which four were

photographed for this documentation project. The 32-bay, brick Erecting Shop was used for heavy repair of steam locomotives, though a 2-bay extension built specifically to perform running maintenance was added to its east end in 1951. The northern half of the Erecting Shop, which has a lower roofline, housed the machine shop. A transfer table along the building's south side moved locomotives to and from the Erecting Shop bays. The higher roofline in this portion accommodated an overhead bridge crane. Both portions of this building feature pitched roofs with

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clerestories. Southeast of the Erecting Shop is the 17-stall Roundhouse, which was built to house running maintenance of steam locomotives, though it later served diesels as well. It is brick, with concrete interior columns, though a large portion of the walls and stall doors are multipane windows to admit natural light. It also has a windowed clerestory. An electrically driven turntable serviced all 17 stalls, and still serves to turn diesel locomotives. The brick Powerhouse located south of the Erecting Shop housed boilers that supplied steam to the entire complex. Farther south are the Wheel Shop, which maintained wheels, axles, and bearings for the system, and a large, partially open Freight Car Shop. This served as the railroad's heavy car repair shop. Visible in one photograph is a portion of the Passenger Car Shop, used to maintain those cars as long as the railroad operated passenger trains. Other ancillary buildings not specifically identified are visible in some of the photographs.

HISTORY:

Andrew Carnegie established the Pittsburgh, Bessemer & Lake Erie Railroad Company in 1897 to carry iron ore from Conneaut, Ohio, on Lake Erie to Carnegie Steel Company plants in and around Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Forming a link between his plants and the Great Lakes ore boats arriving in Conneaut from Minnesota's Missabe Iron Range, it was part of his plan to form a complete, vertically integrated steel company. The core of the PB&LE was formed by two small lines Carnegie absorbed: the Pittsburgh, Shenango & Lake Erie Railroad, and the Butler & Pittsburgh Railroad. The company was renamed the Bessemer & Lake Erie Railroad in 1900. Carnegie Steel had an exclusive 999 year lease to the B&LE. This lease was acquired by United States Steel when that company acquired Carnegie Steel in 1901. The Bessemer & Lake Erie Railroad became part of Transtar, Inc., in 1988, and subsequently a part of Great Lakes Transportation, LLC, in 2001. Since 2004, the Bessemer & Lake Erie has been operated as a unit of the Canadian National Railway. Iron ore remains the route's major freight commodity, although coal has always been a convenient backhaul to Conneaut.

The Pittsburgh, Shenango & Lake Erie Railroad began construction of the Greenville, Pennsylvania, shops in 1893, but the largest portion of the complex was added in several stages by successor Bessemer & Lake Erie. The last major structure to be added was the Diesel Shop in 1951. Much of the steam-era facilities gradually fell into disuse after the road completely dieselized, but portions continued to house various support functions. The complex was redundant to Canadian National, and it has been largely abandoned in place since shortly after the merger. The turntable still sees service turning diesel locomotives when needed.

The shop complex is located beside the Pittsburgh, Shenango & Lake Erie Railroad's original main line, which largely followed the Little Shenango and Shenango rivers between the villages of Osgood, north of Greenville, and Kremis to the south. Since this route involved steep grades out of Greenville in both directions, the Bessemer & Lake Erie built a new line between Osgood and Kremis in 1902 that bypassed Greenville and these grades and shortened the run by three miles. The original line remained in place to serve the shop and local customers.

HISTORIAN: J. Lawrence Lee, Ph.D., P.E.

SOURCES: Roy C. Beaver, The Bessemer and Lake Erie Railroad, 1869-1969, San

Marino, CA: Golden West Books, 1969.

Robert Lorenzo and Nathan S. Clark, Jr., Bessemer and Lake Erie in

Color, Kutztown, PA: Morning Sun Books, 1994.

**PROJECT** 

INFORMATION: The Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) photo documented

recorded the site in 2006 at the request of Nathan S. Clark, Jr. It was conducted under the general direction of Richard O'Connor, Chief, Historic Documentation Programs (HDP). Christopher Marston, HAER Architect, coordinated the project, with the assistance of J. Lawrence Lee, HAER Engineer-Historian. Jet Lowe produced the large format

photographs.

RELATED

DOCUMENTATION: College Avenue Bridge, HAER PA-83

Bessemer & Lake Erie Railroad, Allegheny River Bridge,

HAER No. PA-508

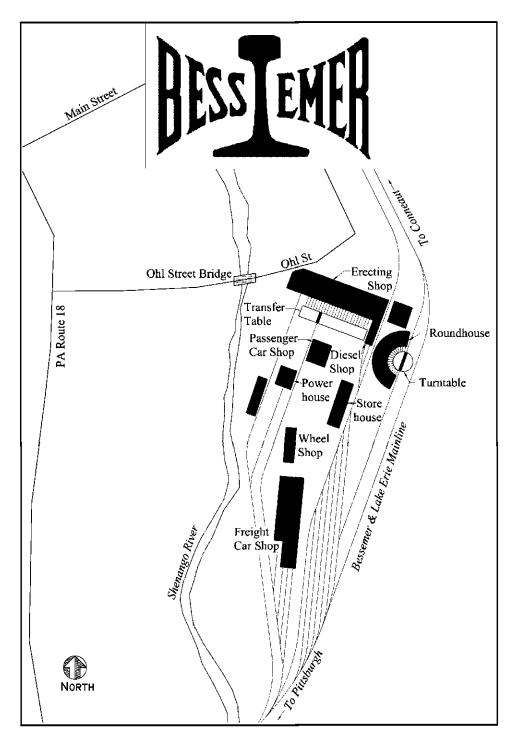


Figure 1. Map of Bessemer & Lake Erie Railroad, Greenville Shops complex, ca. 2006. Drawing by Christopher H. Marston, HAER Architect.